A GUIDE FOR WRITING OBJECTIVES
FOR STC ANNUAL COURSE CERTIFICATION
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Program is to raise the level of competency of local corrections and probation officers. To accomplish this goal, the STC Program provides quality, job-related training. Certification of each course requires clearly stated instructional objectives. The Policies and Procedures Manual for Training Providers emphasizes instructional objectives as a means to enhance the training effort. The following overview is provided to assist those who prepare course objectives for ANNUAL course certification and is intended only as a summary of the methods involved. For more in-depth information please refer to the publications listed on page 10.

FUNCTIONS OF OBJECTIVES

Instructional objectives for training courses serve many purposes. For the trainee, objectives provide a focus for the learning. For the instructor, they give direction for course design. For the training officer, objectives serve as a basis for dialogue with training providers to ensure that the training will meet the department's needs and to evaluate course effectiveness. For managers, objectives allow a better understanding of the training so that the results can be transferred back to the job. For administrators, objectives assist in the evaluation of the training investment and serve to justify the link between training and desired job performance. For governing boards, and all others responsible for training, objectives can help reduce legal liability associated with inappropriately trained personnel.

DEFINITIONS

Objectives are descriptive statements of instructional intent. Basically, there are two types of objectives for STC purposes: Instructional and Organizational. Instructional Objectives describe expected INDIVIDUAL trainee behavior at course completion. Organizational Objectives (sometimes called Central Results Objectives) describe GROUP behavior at the completion of training. Both types of objectives describe the expected outcome of the training at course end, not the anticipated impact of training back on the job.

A. Instructional Objectives

Instructional Objectives are comprised of three elements: condition, behavior, and criterion. Condition is the circumstance under which the trainee demonstrates the learning. Behavior is the observable activity the

trainee demonstrates. <u>Criterion</u> is the level of achievement required. For example:

Instructional Objective

At the conclusion of the training session, trainees…

Behavior: will describe
Criterion: at least three major symptoms of alcohol withdrawal
Condition: without reference to the medical screening handbook, the trainee.

B. Organizational Objectives

Organizational Objectives state behaviors leading to a product or outcome developed by the participants as a group effort. For example:

Organizational Objective

At the conclusion of the training session, participants…

Behavior: will have produced
Product: a written action plan to implement an inmate classification system.

DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES

It is easiest to approach the task of writing objectives as a three-step process dealing with each element separately..

A. Step One: Behavior

First, isolate the desired behavior or product. Keep the phrase "able to do" in mind and try to answer the question: **"What should the trainee be able to do as a result of the training?"** Use action verbs in the objectives that describe observable behavior; e.g., identify, demonstrate, label, write, explain, describe.

Avoid words that denote internal processes that cannot be observed; e.g., know, understand, learn. (A list of action verbs is attached in Appendix A, page 8.)

When selecting the action verb, choose the one that most clearly conveys the instructional intent. For instance, a child abuse recognition class might be described by the following action verbs in an objective:

- LABEL blunt trauma marks
- IDENTIFY blunt trauma marks

If the point of the training is to teach the students how to *recognize* bruises, not draw pictures of the bruises on a diagram, the verb IDENTIFY would be the more pertinent verb for this course objective. On the other hand, if the thrust of the training is to teach students how to document child abuse for the future courtroom evidence, the verb LABEL might be the more appropriate choice.

B. Step Two: Condition

Next, describe the condition under which the trainee will be asked to perform the desired behavior. The condition includes materials or information given to the trainees at the time they are tested. Construct the condition which most closely resembles that found on the job. For example, usually there is time to consult a <u>Physician's Desk Reference</u> during a medical screening. There is never time to read the <u>Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Booklet</u> when CPR is required.

Frequently, the condition is introduced by the words "given," "provided," "allowed," or "using." It can also state restrictions. Examples:

> Given a list of references to the Penal Code…
> Using the departmental procedures manual…
> Without receiving any physical assistance…

PITFALLS OF CONDITIONS

There are some major pitfalls to avoid when deciding on the conditions:

Skip Obvious Conditions

Sometimes the condition is so obvious it does not need stating; e.g.,
> **Given handcuffs***,* the trainee will handcuff…
> **Given the booking form***,* the trainee will fill it out…
> **Given paper and pen**…

Don't Use Instructional Process

A common trap to avoid when formulating the condition is to describe the instructional process rather than the condition at the time of testing. For example:

Given practice role-playing counseling techniques…
Given practice on the resuscitation doll…

Don't Describe Type of Test

Another trap is to describe the type of test. Merely stating the type of test is distinguished from a well-written condition which describes test information.

NOT RECOMMENDED:	RECOMMENDED:
Type of Test	Test Information
Given a true-false test…	***Given a diagram of the jail,*** the trainee will identify the 5 emergency exits within 60 seconds.
Given multiple choice items…	
	Given a list of 10 behaviors, the trainees will select those that indicate suicide risk.

C. Step Three: Criterion

Last, specify the criterion. As with condition, select the level of achievement closest to that required on the job. Set an acceptable level as the minimum standard, (not perfect or optimal levels – unless that is also the minimum required). Use a reasonable approximation of success with which others in the profession would probably agree.

When describing the criterion, avoid imprecise words. Instead, use words that minimize the possibility of misinterpretation.

Imprecise	Precise
• effective • acceptable • properly • average	• all of the following… • at least 9 out of 10… • in accordance with… • procedures defined in…

Occasionally, it is impractical to include a criterion that quantifies behavior. For example: *"to express four empathic responses during a*

30-minute interview." Empathic responses may vary in depth and pertinence. To contrive an objective yardstick for these qualities would be cumbersome and artificial. In these cases, either omit the criterion or rework the objective to describe a less qualitative aspect of the course.

REFINING THE OBJECTIVES

A. Common Errors

There are some common errors to avoid when writing instructional objectives. One error is to describe the instructor's behavior rather than the trainee's.

Example: "Five strategies of self-defense will be presented."

Another fault is to describe the learning process versus the learning product.

Example: "Each trainee will practice CPR on the resuscitator doll for 15 minutes."

Still another pitfall is to describe the course content vs. course intent.

Example: "An Update of Adult and Juvenile Law."

B. Final Not Intermediate Behavior

Instructional objectives for Annual STC courses will probably be best comprised of terminal or final skills versus prerequisite, enabling, or intermediate skills. For example "….forms a tight seal on the mouth of the resuscitator doll" is a terminal skill; "….locates the mouth of the resuscitator doll" is only a step in the right direction. In fact, "forms a tight seal" could be considered an intermediate skill to "….correctly resuscitates the doll." The choice here depends on the intent and scope of the course.

C. Level of Specificity

Objectives should represent the major training accomplishments expected but not to be an all-inclusive list of behaviors for each trainee. The following breakdown illustrates levels of specificity:

- to communicate in writing
- to write a pre-sentence court report

- to construct complete sentences

For a court report writing course, the second level of specificity, *to write a pre-sentence court report,* is the most representative level.

D. Stay Close to the Action

When practical, write an objective that requires the trainee to demonstrate rather than merely discuss or describe a behavior. For instance: "*Given a cloth and a stick, the trainee will apply a tourniquet to a classmate's leg.*" is more compelling evidence of skill attainment than merely, "The trainee will describe how to apply a tourniquet."

E. Meaningful Objectives

When developing the objective, consider their worth. Include need-to-know rather than nice-to-know items. To decide if an objective is worthwhile, examine whether the skill described in the objective is one that is deemed important to use back on the job. Example:

The trainee will be able to describe the procedure for obtaining Criminal Identification and Information (a CII Report).

The trainee will be able to interpret a CII Report.

It could be argued that to interpret the CII Report, one must be able to obtain it: but, the more meaningful objective is to able to use it. Make sure the goal of the training is linked to an important job task.

OBJECTIVES AND TESTING

Instructional Objectives and testing go hand-in-hand. Objectives describe outcomes of training; testing measures the outcomes. Testing is optional for Annual Training but if conducted, should be closely linked to the objectives. (Testing is required for Core courses. Please see STC's Testing for Core Courses for more information.)

OBJECTIVES, TESTING AND LIABILITY

Although testing is not required for Annual training, training providers might consider testing for knowledge or skills that are closely linked with potential liability (e.g., false arrests, the wrong physical restraint technique). If failure to properly train is alleged in litigation, well-written objectives and test results may substantiate that the trainee was trained in and demonstrated the correct skills at course completion. For further documentation of

adequate training, tightly formulated instructional objectives with testing may be a safer choice than organizational objectives with products or group outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Constructing well-written objectives requires practice. As with most other elements of course development, the process itself often leads to a clearer perspective for the developer/instructor and a better learning experience for the trainee. The pay-off is well worth the effort.

APPENDIX

A. ACTION VERBS

(Examples of behavioral words):

write	match	draw
recite	express	collect
find	explain	differentiate
solve	assign	answer orally
list	repair	answer in writing
state	remove	locate
operate	name	construct
prepare	describe in writing	trace
restore	remove	replace
test	isolate	clean
identify	ascend	conduct
install	calculate	descend
adjust	underline	assemble
repeat	record	define
relate	translate	recall

restate	inventory	debate
examine	categorize	discuss
compose	review	report
tell	purpose	plan
design	apply	interpret
employ	arrange	formulate
create	demonstrate	use
dramatize	organize	set up
manage	illustrate	practice
schedule	sketch	prepare
distinguish	rate	evaluate
revise	appraise	analyze
experiment	select	score
choose	contrast	compare
criticize	measure	assess
inspect		diagram

B. CHECKLIST FOR WRITING INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

___ Is the language precise and not open to interpretation?

___ Is the condition as close as possible to realistic, on-the-job conditions?

___ Did I describe what the trainee will do vs. what the instructor will do?

___ Are my objectives specific and at the appropriate level of competency?

___ Did I write objectives that reflect the overall intent and scope of the course?

___ Can I easily write a test item that will measure this objective?

___ Did I describe the learning process instead of the product?

___ Did I describe the course content instead of the objective's conditions?

___ Have I structured the objectives in a logical sequence?
___ Is the behavior something I can observe or measure at the end of the course?
___ Have I used an action verb? (See list on Page 8.)

DON'T USE THESE NONBEHAVIORAL WORDS		
know	be aware of	think
comprehend	learn	have knowledge of
enjoy	really understand	remember
be familiar with	perceive	be acquainted with
understand	sympathize with	develop appreciation
appreciate	grasp significance of	recognize

REFERENCES

The following books are good sources of additional information.

A. Recommended Reading

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